

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3100

INFO DIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

CDR USSAG NKP

C O N F T S D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 2180

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CB, LA, VS

SUBJECT: LAO REACTIONS TO DEVELOPMENTS IN VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA

REFS: A) STATE 060416 (NOTAL)

B) FBIS/BANGKOK 261243Z MARCH 75

BEGIN SUMMARY: LAO REACTION TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA AND PARTICULARLY IN SOUTH VIET-NAM HAS LATELY BEGUN TO CRYSTALLIZE AND IS NOW TAKING DISCERNIBLE LINES. FIRST AND PERHAPS MOST OBVIOUS IS VIENTIANE SIDE BELIEF THAT WHILE NO IMMEDIATE MILITARY CONSEQUENCES FOR LAOS ARE LIKELY, THE PATHET LAO, EMBOLDENED BY COMMUNIST SUCCESSES ELSEWHERE IN INDOCHINA, WILL ADOPT INCREASINGLY TOUGH POSITIONS HERE. SECOND IS SHOCK AT RAPID DETERIORATION OF GVN POSITION, WHICH HAS PRODUCED DEEP PESSIMISM AND DESPONDENCY AMONG LEADERS OF VIENTIANE SIDE AND

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PARTICULARLY AMONG FAR OFFICERS.

THERE IS ALSO A GROWING TENDENCY AMONG RESPONSIBLE FIGURES TO SAY OPENLY AND BITTERLY THAT THE U.S. IS ABANDONING ITS FRIENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. MEANWHILE, PL AND OTHER COMMUNISTS HERE ARE USING EVENTS IN SVN AND CAMBODIA IN "PSYWAR" APPROACHES TO INDIVIDUAL VIENTIANE SIDE/FAR LEADERS.

THESE FACTORS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY COMBINE TO AFFECT BOTH VIENTIANE SIDE MORALE AND PGNU POLICY. MORALE FACTOR IS REFLECTED IN CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TRIMMING BY MID-LEVEL CIVIL SERVANTS AND MILITARY OFFICIALS; FIRST MAJOR POLICY SHIFT IS SOUVANNA'S DEMAND THAT GKR AND GVN REDUCE REPRESENTATION HERE TO CHARGE LEVEL. END SUMMARY

1. INFLUENTIAL LAO PERSONALITIES APPEAR TO HAVE FOLLOWED CURRENT DRY-SEASON OFFENSIVE IN CAMBODIA WITH INTEREST BUT ALSO WITH SOME DETACHMENT. SUCH INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTS AS CLOSURE OF MEKONG AND ROCKETING OF PHNOM PENH HAVE BEEN NOTED BUT TO SOME EXTENT WITH DISINTEREST, PERHAPS IN BELIEF THAT GKR HAD LITTLE CHANCE OF SURVIVAL ANYWAY. WE HAVE HEARD RELATIVELY FEW SPECIFIC RECRIMINATIONS ABOUT LACK OF USG SUPPORT TO GKR, ALTHOUGH ADMINISTRATION'S FAILURE SO FAR TO OBTAIN REQUESTED APPROPRIATIONS FROM CONGRESS IS WELL KNOWN HERE. WE HAVE ALSO NOTED OCCASIONAL SIGNS OF SMUGNESS THAT LAO HAVE ACHIEVED A SETTLEMENT WHILE CAMBODIANS ARE UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO NEGOTIATE.

2. PGNU HAS IN ADDITION SHOWN CERTAIN SANG FROID BY LEAVING ITS TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS (FIRST SECRETARY/CHARGE AND THIRD SECRETARY) IN PHNOM PENH IN PLACE, WITH NO KNOWN PLANS FOR THEIR EVACUATION. (LAST WEEK, HOWEVER, THIRD SECRETARY RETURNED TEMPORARILY TO VIENTIANE TO REPORT ON SITUATION, BRINGING HIS FAMILY OUT WITH HIM. FIRST SECRETARY, WHO WENT TO PHNOM PENH UNACCOMPANIED, REMAINS THERE.) EARLIER, MAJORITY OF LAO STUDENTS IN PHNOM PENH WERE EVACUATED, BUT WITHOUT MUCH FANFARE. TO SOME EXTENT, LAO APPEARED ALMOST EQUALLY WORRIED OVER IMPLICATIONS OF A POSSIBLE GKR COLLAPSE FOR THAILAND, WHICH REMAIN LAOS' CONFIDENTIAL

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MAIN COMMERCIAL AND TRANSPORTATION LINK WITH REST OF WORLD.

3. EVENTS OF LAST THREE WEEKS IN VIET-NAM, HOWEVER, AND PARTICULARLY GVN RELINQUISHMENT OF TERRITORY IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND MR-I, HAVE HAD CONCENTRATED IMPACT ON LAO LEADERS WHICH SLOWER AND LESS DRAMATIC TEND IN CAMBODIA DID NOT. WE ARE NOW HEARING, IN CONVERSATIONS WITH

VIENTIANE SIDE CABINET MEMBERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS AND WITH SENIOR FAR OFFICERS, A MARKED DEGREE OF DESPONDENCY AND BITTERNESS THAT WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY EVIDENT.

4. THE MOST WIDESPREAD VIENTIANE SIDE VIEW IS THAT THE PATHET LAO WILL GAIN ADDED CONFIDENCE FROM MILITARY SUCCESSES OF VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN COMMUNISTS, WILL BECOME MORE CONVINCED THAN BEFORE THAT TIME AND HISTORY ARE ON THEIR SIDE, AND WILL THEREFORE TURN INCREASINGLY AGGRESSIVE WITHIN PGNU IN PUSHING FOR THEIR OWN POSITIONS AND IN ASSERTING RIGHT TO CO-ADMINISTER PARTS OF VIENTIANE ZONE, PARTICIPATE IN MANAGEMENT OF ALL FOREIGN ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE, ETC.

5. DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK IS A LEADING EXPONENT OF THIS POINT OF VIEW. HE TOLD VIENTIANE DAILY XAT LAO THIS WEEK (REF B) THAT "IF SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, NOTABLY NORTH VIET-NAM, ACHIEVE A MILITARY VICTORY IN CAMBODIA AND CAN RETAKE PHNOM PENH," THERE WOULD BE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND TRANQUILITY IN LAOS: "THE LPF COULD DEMAND MANY THINGS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE." IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR, SISOUK HAS PUT THIS THOUGHT IN TERMS OF GREATER PATHET LAO "INSOLENCE."

6. IN SAME CONVERSATION, SISOUK, ECHOED BY MINISTER OF HEALTH KHAMPHAY ABHAY) WENT ON TO DEPLORE STATE OF NEAR-ANARCHY THAT NOW PREVAILS IN BAN HOU EI SAI AS RESULT OF PATHET LAO INFLUENCE AND INTERFERENCE THERE AND THAT THREATENS TO DEVELOP ELSEWHERE IN LAOS. HE ALSO COMMENTED ON DIFFICULTY OF EXTRACTING OBEDIENCE FROM SUB-CABINET OFFICIALS AND MIDDLE-RANKING FAR OFFICERS, SAYING THAT SOME WERE CLEARLY BEHAVING IN MANNER DESIGNED TO INGRATIATE

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THEMSELVES WITH PATHET LAO. (IT CAN BE ARGUED OF COURSE THAT PATHET LAO WERE DOING RELATIVELY WELL IN COALITION AND HARDLY NEEDED OUTSIDE INSPIRATION TO GET TOUGH; HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE VIENTIANE SIDE FINDS IT CONVENIENT TO CITE EXTERNAL FACTORS AND BEG QUESTION OF ITS OWN FREQUENT FAILURES TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY TO PL CHALLENGES OR TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE.)

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7. AT THE SAME TIME, MOST OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED BELIEVE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES FOR LAOS OF VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN SITUATIONS ARE PRIMARILY PSYCHOLOGICAL, WITH NO RPT NO EARLY LIKELIHOOD THAT PATHET LAO WILL RESUME HOSTILITIES; AT MOST, VIENTIANE SIDE LEADERS FORESEE SOME INCREASE IN FREQUENCY OF MINOR PROBING ACTIONS THAT HAVE CHARACTERIZED CEASE-FIRE PERIOD TO DATE. INDEED, IT SEEMS TO BE AN ARTICLE OF DOCTRINE IN THE FAR THAT HANOI'S MILITARY PRIORITIES IN DESCENDING ORDER ARE SOUTH VIET-NAM, CAMBODIA, NORTHEAST THAILAND, AND FINALLY LAOS.

8. EVEN IN ABSENCE OF A PERCEIVED EARLY THREAT TO LAO TERRITORY, HOWEVER, SENIOR FAR COMMANDERS ARE OBVIOUSLY SHOCKED BY TURN OF EVENTS IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AND IN LAST FEW DAYS HAVE APPEARED DESPONDENT AND APPREHENSIVE. DURING COURSE OF FRANK AND GLOOMY SESSION AT MR-V HQ
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MARCH 25, AND LATER IN CONVERSATION WITH FAR G-2 GENERAL THAO LY, DATT HEARD AMPLE EVIDENCE OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND

SOME BITTERNESS DIRECTED AT USG. ONE OFFICER SAID, IN EFFECT, THAT EVEN IF THE LAO MANAGED TO MAINTAIN SOME KIND OF NON-COMMUNIST PRESENCE THEY WOULD BE ISOLATED AND ALONE. ANOTHER ADDED, "YOU AMERICANS ARE NOW DOING JUST WHAT THE FRENCH DID TO US 20 YEARS AGO." MR-II COMMANDER GENERAL VANG PAO HAS EXPRESSED SIMILAR VIEWS. ON CIVILIAN SIDE, NATIONAL BANK DIRECTOR OUDONG SOUVANNAVONG TOLD USAID DIRECTOR IT WAS U.S. THAT HAD ENCOURAGED RESISTANCE TO NORTH VIETNAMESE AGGRESSION IN THE REST OF INDOCHINA BUT WAS NOW ABANDONING THOSE LAO, CAMBODIANS AND VIETNAMESE WHO HAD SIDED WITH AMERICANS TO A DISMAL FATE.

9. SOME FAR OFFICERS AND OTHERS BELIEVE THAT THE U.S. IS OBLIGED TO "SAVE" SOUTH VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA, ALTHOUGH THEY DO NOT SPECIFY WHAT THEY EXPECT THE U.S. TO DO OR INDEED WHAT OPTIONS MAY REMAIN TO U.S. IN LIGHT OF LEGISLATIVE RESTRICTIONS AND APPARENT UNWILLINGNESS OF CONGRESS TO APPROPRIATE ADDITIONAL AID FOR INDOCHINA. ONE OF LEAST PESSIMISTIC LAO OFFICIALS IS FONMIN DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS, WHO FINISHED A TOUR AS LAO AMBASSADOR TO PHNOM PENH LAST SUMMER; HE DOUBTS THAT PHNOM PENH WILL FALL THIS DRY SEASON, IF ONLY BECAUSE U.S. WILL SOMEHOW PREVENT SUCH AN EVENTUALITY.

10. COMMUNISTS IN LAOS HAVE NOT BEEN SLOW TO EXPLOIT EVENTS IN VIET-NAM AND CAMBODIA FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PURPOSES. PATHET LAO RADIO, IN ANNIVERSARY GREETINGS TO FUNK, HAILED "THE SPLENDID VICTORIES OF THE CAMBODIA PEOPLE." THE MR-V CHIEF OF STAFF WAS ASKED BY A PETHET LAO OFFICER, "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHEN THE AMERICANS ARE GONE AND WE TAKE OVER?" SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE COLONEL VASSILI TSARKOV, IN CONVERSATIONS WITH FAR OFFICERS, IS TAKING THE LINE THAT TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR NON-COMMUNISTS THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA, WHO SHOULD THEREFORE CONSIDER SWITCHING SIDES WHILE THEY STILL CAN.

11. THE REPERCUSSIONS IN LAOS OF DEVELOPMENTS ELSEWHERE IN INDOCHINA ARE MAINLY PSYCHOLOGICAL SO FAR, AND THE MORE TANGIBLE CONSEQUENCES WILL HAVE TO BE ASSESSED AT
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A LATER DATE. CLEARLY, HOWEVER, SOUVANNA'S ORDER THAT CAMBODIAN AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE REPRESENTATION HERE BE REDUCED TO CHARGE LEVEL (VIENTIANE 2076 AND VIENTIANE 2040) IS FIRST SUCH CONCRETE RESULT. MINDEF SISOUK HIMSELF APPEARED TO BE LEAVING DOOR OPEN FOR PROMPT PGNU ADJUSTMENT TO ANY CHANGE OF REGIME IN PHNOM PENH IN XAT LAO INTERVIEW CITED ABOVE; HE SAID "LAOS RECOGNIZES AND MAINTAINS RELATIONS WITH NATIONS AND NOT WITH GOVERNMENTS, SINCE LATTER MAY BE DEPOSED BUT FORMER REMAIN. LAOS HAS

AND WILL MAINTAIN RELATIONS WITH WHATEVER CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT IS IN PLACE IN THE CAPITAL, NO MATTER WHO HEADS IT." THIS, HE SAID, WAS BASIS FOR CURRENT RELATIONS WITH LON NOL GOVERNMENT.

12. IN SUM, THE LAO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INCLINED TO EXAGGERATE IMPORTANCE OF GREAT-POWER ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR AND THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL EVENTS. NO ONE WE HAVE TALKED TO SHARES AMBASSADOR KHAMPHAN PANYA'S EXAGGERATED REACTION TO PROSPECT OF CONGRESSIONAL CUT-OFF OF AID TO CAMBODIA (REF A), BUT THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF DRAMATIC EVENTS -- PARTICULARLY THOSE NOW UNFOLDING IN VIET-NAM -- COULD PROMPT OTHERS TO RECONSIDER THEIR PERSONAL FUTURES. AT A MINIMUM, WE MUST ANTICIPATE PERIOD OF DEMORALIZATION ON VIENTIANE SIDE; SOME MUSCLE-FLEXING BY THE PATHET LAO; AND GREATER DISPOSITION BY SOUVANNA AND PROBABLY BY PGNU TO ACCOMMODATE TO GROWING COMMUNIST STRENGTH THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA. IN THIS LAST REGARD, THE THAI EXAMPLE WILL BE INFLUENTIAL. WE HAVE HEARD LITTLE DISCUSSION AMONG LAO LEADERS SO FAR OF SUCH DETAILED US-THAI ISSUES AS AMMO FLIGHTS FROM UTAPAO TO CAMBODIA OR TIME-LIMIT ON OUR MILITARY PRESENCE, BUT WE EXPECT THAT THE LAO WILL TAKE RESOLUTION OF THESE ISSUES INTO ACCOUNT JUST AS THEY WILL WATCH CLOSELY ANY THAI MOVES TOWARD RELATIONS WITH PRC AND ACCOMMODATION WITH DRV.

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